MONTAIGNE'S ESSAY ON FRIENDSHIP AND XXIX SONNETS

BY

ESTIENNE DE LA BOETIE

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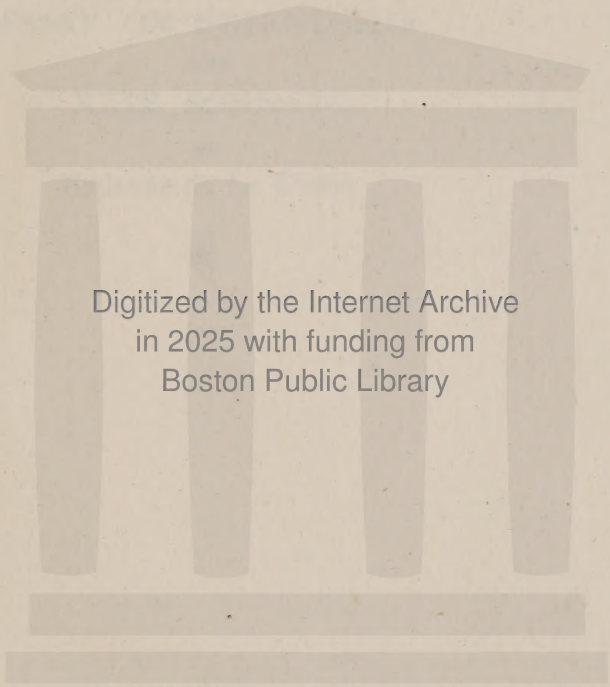

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Translated into English by
Louis How

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TO

CAROLINE RUUTZ-REES

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ON FRIENDSHIP

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ON FRIENDSHIP

ON CONSIDERING HOW A painter I have carries on his work, I have had a notion to imitate him. He chooses the best place in the middle of each wall to put there a picture elaborated with all his skill; and the space all around he fills up with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings, having no charm but in their variety and oddness. What else indeed are these writings, as a matter of fact, but grotesques and monstrous shapes, patched together of diverse limbs, without any exact figure, having no order, arrangement, or other than a haphazard proportion?

Desinit in piscam mulier formosa superne.

(A woman beautiful above ends in a fish below)

I can go along in this second point with my painter: but I fall short in the other and better part; for my skill is not great enough to dare to undertake a rich and finished picture, formed after the rules of art. I have decided to borrow one from Estienne de La Boetie, which will shed honour on all the rest of this work: it is a treatise to which he gave the name of *Voluntary Servitude;* but those who did not know that, have since very properly re-baptized it, *As against One.* He wrote it as a sort of essay in his early youth, in honour of liberty as against tyrants. Since that time it passes about through the hands of intelligent people, not without great and well-deserved praise; because it is charming and as full as possible. Still one must say that it is not the best he could have done: and if at the more advanced age when I knew him, he had formed a design like mine to write down his fancies, we should have seen a good many rare things, which would very nearly have approached the glory of antiquity; for in this sort of natural gifts espe-

cially, I have known nobody comparable to him. But nothing of his has remained except this treatise, — and that only by chance, for I believe that he never saw it after it got away from him, — and some remarks on that January edict, famous through our civil wars, which shall perhaps still find a place somewhere. That is all I have been able to recover of his remains, I whom he left, with so loving a charge, death between his teeth, heir by will to his library and his papers, besides the little book of his works which I have had brought out. And I am moreover particularly obliged to this piece, in that it served as the means for our first being acquainted; for it was shown to me a long while before I ever saw him, and gave me my first knowledge of his name, thus starting that friendship, which, between us, we cherished, while God willed, so complete and so perfect, that certainly there are not many similar to be read of, and among our men of to-day no trace of them is seen in practice. So many things must come together to build one, that it is a good deal if destiny manages it once in three centuries.

There is nothing to which nature seems more

to incline us than society; and Aristotle says that good lawmakers have taken more care for friendship than for justice. Now the supreme point of its perfection is such a one as that; for in general all those friendships that pleasure or profit, or public or private ends, forge and nourish, are just so much less lovely and generous, and just so much less friendships, as they mix another cause and purpose and fruit with friendship besides itself. Nor do those four antique sorts, natural, social, hospitable, venerean, suffice, either separately or conjointly.

From children to their parents, it is rather respect. Friendship feeds on confidence, and that cannot exist between them because of too great disparity, and perhaps it would interfere with their natural duties: for neither can all the secret thoughts of parents be confided to their children, for fear of creating an unseemly familiarity; nor can the advice and reproofs which are among the first offices of friendship, be exercised by children toward their parents. There have been nations where it was the custom for children to kill their parents, and others where the parents killed their children, to avoid the

hinderance they may sometimes cause one another; and by nature one depends on the ruin of the other. Philosophers have been found who despised this natural tie: witness Aristippus, who, when importuned about the affection he owed his children as being issued from him, fell to spitting, saying that that was just as much issued from him; that we bred many lice and worms; and witness that other whom Plutarch tried to induce to make friends with his brother: "I don't set any more by him," said he, "for having come out of the same hole." It is, in truth, a beautiful name and delectable, that name of *brother*, and for that reason he and I made our alliance by it: but this mixture of property, these divisions, and the fact that the richness of one should be the poverty of the other, all that wonderfully weakens and relaxes the fraternal tie; since brothers must conduct the progress of their advancement in the same path and at the same rate, perforce they often interfere and collide. Moreover, why should the congeniality and relation that begets those real and perfect friendships, be found here? Father and son may be of entirely foreign dispositions, and brothers also:

he is my son, he is my kinsman, but he is a savage person, a rascal, or a fool. And besides, in so far as these are friendships which law and natural obligation impose on us, they are so much the less of our own choice and free will; and our free will has no product more punctually its own than affection and friendship. It is n't that I have not experienced in this direction all that can be found there, having had the best father that ever was, and the most indulgent even till his extreme old age; and being of a family famous from father to son, and exemplary, in this relation of brotherly concord: —

Et ipse
Notus in fratres animi paterni.

(And myself noted for my fatherly feeling toward my brothers)

One cannot compare to this our affection toward women, although that does spring from our own choice, nor can one put that into this rôle. Its flame, I confess it, —

Neque enim est dea nescia nostri,
Quæ dulcem curis miscat amaritiam, —

(For neither is the goddess unknown to us,
who mingles a sweet bitterness with our pain)

is livelier, hotter, and sharper; but 't is a daring and fickle flame, flickering and changeable, a fever flame, subject to increase and diminution, and touching us only at one corner. In friendship, there is a general and universal warmth, temperate moreover, and equable; a warmth that 's constant and serene, all sweetness and smoothness, with nothing sharp or poignant in it. Furthermore, in love, there is only a mad desire for what flees: —

Come segue la lepre il cacciatore
Al freddo, al caldo, alla montagna, al lito;
Ne più l'estima poi che presa vede;
E sol dietro a chi fugge affretta il piede:

(So as the hunter follows on the hare
Through cold and heat, by mountains and the
shore;
Nor prizes it when once 't is made a prize;
And only presses hard on prey that flies)

as soon as it enters on terms of friendship, that is to say on an agreement of desires, it grows

faint and languid; pleasure is lost, as having a carnal aim which is subject to satiety. Friendship, on the contrary, is enjoyed in the same measure that it is desired; nor does it begin, feed, and grow but through enjoyment, as being spiritual, and the soul being sharpened by usage. Beneath the perfect friendship, these volatile affections formerly had their place with me, not to speak of him, who confesses it only too much in his verses: thus in me these two passions have come to a knowledge of each other, but to a comparison, never; the first keeping on its way in a high, proud flight, and disdainfully watching the other spread her wings very far below.

As for marriage, besides that it is a bargain whose entrance only is free, its duration being compelled and forced and dependent on circumstances beyond our choice, and a bargain too which is ordinarily made for other purposes, there come to light here many fortuitous kinks to disentangle, sufficient to break the thread and trouble the course of a lively affection: whereas in friendship, there is no other business or concern but friendship itself. Then too, to say the truth, the ordinary capacity of women is not

sufficient for that confidence and self-disclosure which is the nurse of this sacred bond; and their souls seem not strong enough to sustain the pressure of a knot so tight and so lasting. And surely, except for that, if there might arise a free and voluntary relation, wherein not only the soul should have her entire enjoyment, but the body too have a share in the partnership, so that the whole man was engaged, it is certain that the friendship would be all the more full and complete: but the other sex has no example to show that it was ever able to attain to this, and is by the common consent of the ancient schools, rejected.

And that other Greek license is justly abhorrent to our customs: the which, moreover, since, by their practice, it required a so necessary disparity of age and difference of vocation between the lovers, also did not quite respond to the perfect union and agreement that we are here demanding: *Quis est enim iste amor amicitiæ? Cur neque deformem adolescentem quisquam amat, neque formosum senem?* (What then is this love in friendship? Why does nobody ever love an ill-favoured youth or a handsome old man?) For the picture the Academy itself gives will not, I

think, contradict me, if I speak of it thus: that the first fury, inspired by the son of Venus in the lover's heart at sight of a flower of tender youth, to which they permit all the insolent and passionate efforts that immoderate ardour can produce, was founded simply on an outward beauty, false image of corporal generation; for it could not be founded on the intelligence, whose pattern was still hidden, and which was only in its birth and before the age of budding: that if this fury seized upon a low character, the means of his pursuit would be riches, gifts, help to advancement in office, and such other vile merchandise, which they reprehend; if it hit upon a nobler character, his methods were accordingly noble, philosophic instruction, lessons in the reverence for religion, obedience to the laws, death for the good of one's country, examples of bravery, prudence, justice; the lover studying to make himself acceptable by the grace and beauty of his soul, that of his body being faded, and hoping through this mental intercourse, to establish a stronger and more lasting partnership. When this pursuit attained its end in due time (for whereas they do not require the lover to

bring leisure and caution to his undertaking, they do strictly require it of the beloved, inasmuch as he had to judge of an inward beauty, difficult to know and dark to discover); then there arose in the beloved the desire of a spiritual conception by the agency of a spiritual beauty. This then was the principal thing; the bodily was accidental and secondary: just the opposite from the lover. For which reason they prefer the beloved, and prove that the gods also prefer him; and severely reprove the poet Æschylus because in the love of Achilles and Patroclus he gave the rôle of lover to Achilles, who was in the first beardless verdure of his youth and the most beautiful of the Greeks. After this general intimacy was arranged, the chief and worthiest part of it performing its duties and predominating, they say that there resulted fruits of great utility to the individuals concerned and to the public; that it was the strength of the countries that recognized the custom, and the principal defense of law and liberty: witness the salutary love of Harmodius and Aristogiton. Therefore they call it sacred and divine; and nothing, in their opinion, except the violence of

tyrants and the cowardice of peoples is adverse to it. In a word, all one can admit in favour of the Academy, is to say that it was a love terminating in friendship; which does not agree badly with the Stoic definition of love: *Amorem conatum esse amicitiæ faciendæ ex pulchritudinis specie.* (Love is the endeavour to form friendship out of an appearance of beauty.)

I return to my description of a more just and steady kind of friendship. *Omnino amicitiæ, corroboratis jam confirmatisque et ingeniis, et ætatibus, judicandæ sunt.* (Friendships are to be considered entirely such, when the minds and the ages are both developed and settled.) For the rest, what we usually call friends and friendships are merely acquaintances and intimacies knit by some occasion or convenience, by means of which our souls speak together. In the friendship of which I write, they mix and blend in each other with so complete a mixing that they efface and never again find the seam that joined them. If you should press me to say why I loved him, I feel that it could be expressed only by answering, "Because it was he, because it was I." There exists after all my discussing and all I can say

to particularize, I know not what inexplicable and fatal force, the mediator of this union. We sought before we saw each other, by reason of reports we heard, which had more influence on our affections than reports should reasonably have; I believe 't was by some divine ordinance. We embraced with our names: and at our first meeting, which was by chance at a great city feast, we found ourselves so captivated, so understood, so obliged by each other, that nothing from then on was so near to either of us as was the other. He wrote an excellent Latin satire, which is published, wherein he excuses and explains the precipitancy of our mutual intelligence thus promptly arrived at perfection. Having so short a while to last, and having begun so late (for we were both grown men and he some years the elder), it had no time to lose; and needed not to conform itself to the pattern of the usual lax friendships, which require so many precautions of long preliminary conversation. This sort has no idea but of itself, and cannot be gauged elsewhere: it was not one especial consideration, or two, or three, or four, or a thousand: 't was I know not what quintessence

of all this mixture, which, seizing my whole will, led it to dive and disappear in his; which, seizing his whole will, led it to dive and disappear in mine, with a like desire, a like consent: I say disappear truly, for we kept back nothing to be our own, to be either his or mine.

When Lælius, in presence of the Roman consuls, who, after the condemnation of Tiberius Gracchus, prosecuted all those that had been in his confidence, came to inquire of Caius Blossius (who was the chief of his friends), how much he would have been willing to do for him, and he had replied, "All things," "How, all things?" he continued; "suppose he had bid you set fire to our temples?" "He would never have bidden it," answered Blossius. "But if he had?" insisted Lælius. "I should have obeyed," responded he. If he was so utterly the friend of Gracchus as the histories say, he had no call to offend the consuls by this last hardy admission; and should not have abandoned the assurance he had of what Gracchus would have desired. But at the same time those who accuse this reply of sedition, do not well understand this mystery, and do not presuppose, which is the truth, that

he kept Gracchus's desires in his pocket, both by power of friendship and by understanding him: they were more friends than citizens, more friends than friends or enemies of their country, than friends of ambition and of disturbance. Having committed themselves entirely to each other, they entirely held the reins of each other's inclination: and only let the equipage have been guided by virtue and driven by reason, and indeed it is quite impossible to harness it otherwise, the reply of Blossius is such as it should have been. If their actions flew off the handle, they were neither friends, by my measure, of each other, nor even friends to themselves. Besides which, this reply does not sound at all different from what mine would if somebody inquired of me: "Should your will command you to kill your daughter, would you kill her?" and I should admit it; for here is no testimony of consenting to the deed; because I am not in any doubt about my will, and in just as little about that of such a friend. Not all the arguments in the world have the power to dislodge me from the certitude I have as to the intentions and judgments of my friend; no one of his actions could

be presented to me, under no matter what appearance, without my being able at once to find the cause. Our souls drove so uniformly together; they considered each other with so ardent an affection, and with equal affection sounded everything to the very bottom of each other's innermost parts, that not only did I know his soul as well as my own, but I should certainly have more willingly trusted myself to him than to myself.

Let nobody put the other common friendships in this rank; I know as much of them as anybody, and of the most perfect of their kind: but I do not advise anyone to confound the rules; he would be deceived. In these other friendships one must ride bridle in hand, with prudence and precaution; the knot is n't fastened in such a manner that there is no room for distrust. "Love him," said Chilon, "as bound some day to hate him; hate him, as bound to love him." This precept, so abominable in that sovereign and supreme friendship, it is salutary to use in ordinary, customary friendships; in regard to which one must apply the saying that Aristotle so often repeated, "O my friends, there is no friend." In this noble commerce, duties and benefits, nurses of the other

friendships, do not merit even to be noticed; the entire confusion of our wills is the cause: for just as the friendship I have for myself is not aggravated by the assistance I give myself when in need, whatsoever the Stoics may say, and as I feel no gratitude for the service I do myself, so the union of such friends, being veritably perfect, makes them lose the sentiment of such duties, and hate and drive away those words of separation and difference, benefit, obligation, gratitude, entreaty, thankfulness, and the like. As everything is really common between them, desires, thoughts, opinions, property, wives, children, honour, and life, and their agreement gives them but one soul in two bodies, according to the very apt definition of Aristotle, they are not able to lend or give each other anything. That is why the lawmakers, to honour marriage with some likeness to this divine union, forbid donations between husband and wife; inferring by this that everything should belong to them both and that they have nothing to divide and separate.

If, in the friendship whereof I speak, one could give to the other, it would be he who received the favour that would oblige his fellow: because, since

each seeks, more than aught else, to do good to the other, he who furnishes the occasion is the liberal one, giving his friend the satisfaction of effecting through him what he most desires. When the philosopher Diogenes had need of money, he used to say that he asked it back from his friends, not that he merely asked it. And to show how this is really practiced, I will recount a curious antique example. Eudamidas the Corinthian had two friends, Charixenus a Sicyonian and Areteus a Corinthian: being about to die, and being poor, and his two friends rich, he made this will: "I give and bequeath to Areteus to keep my mother and to care for her in her old age; to Charixenus to have my daughter marry and to give her the largest dowry he can: and in case one of them should die, I substitute the survivor in his place." Those that first saw this will made fun of it; but when his heirs had been notified they accepted with peculiar satisfaction: and as one of them, Charixenus, expired five days later, the substitution being effected in favour of Areteus, he took the nicest care of the mother; and of five talents he had in his possession, he gave two and a half in marriage with his only

daughter and two and a half for the marriage of Eudamidas's daughter, whose weddings he celebrated the same day.

This example is very sufficient, if there were not one point to be excepted, which is the multitude of friends; for that perfect friendship I speak of is indivisible: each gives himself so wholly to his friend that he has nothing to bestow elsewhere; on the contrary, he is chagrined that he be not double, triple, or quadruple, and that he have not several selves and several souls, to confer them all on the one object. Common friendships one can divide; one can love in this person his good looks; in another, his ease of manner; in another, his generosity; in that person, his fatherliness; in the other his brotherliness, and so on: but the friendship which possesses the soul and rules her in full sovereignty, it is impossible for that to be double. If both demanded help at the same time, to which would you run? If they required conflicting favours of you, how would you arrange it? If one entrusted to your confidence something it were important to the other to know, how would you get out of that? The unique and principal friendship undoes all other

obligations: the secret I have sworn not to disclose to another I may without perjury tell to him who is no other, but is myself. 'Τ is a fairly great miracle to double oneself; and they do not know the size of it who talk of trebling. Nothing is extreme that has a fellow: and whoever imagines that of two I can love one as much as the other, and that they can love each other and me as much as I love them, multiplies into a brotherhood the most single and unique of things, a thing of which even one is the rarest thing in the world to find. The rest of that story agrees very well with what I said: for Eudamidas holds it a kindness and favour to his friends to make use of them at need; he leaves them heirs to this liberality of his which consists of putting into their hands the means to do something for him: and without a doubt the strength of friendship is more richly shown in his action than in Areteus's. After all, such events are unimaginable for him who has not tasted, and therefore I marvel and honour that young soldier's reply to Cyrus, who had asked him for how much he would be willing to give a horse with which he had just won a prize in a race, and whether he would

exchange it for a kingdom: "No indeed, sire; but I should willingly let it go to gain a friend, if I found a man worthy of such an alliance." It was n't bad, his saying, "if I found," for we easily find men fit for a superficial acquaintance: but for this, wherein one negotiates the very bottom of oneself, wherein nothing is left over, certainly there is need for all the springs to be true and perfectly reliable.

In relations that hold together by only one end, we need not regard any imperfections except those that particularly concern that end. It makes no difference what my doctor's religion is, and my lawyer's; that consideration has nothing to do with the friendly offices they owe me: and in my domestic acquaintance with those that serve me, I act similarly, and make little inquiry about a footman as to whether he be chaste, but seek to learn whether he is diligent; and I dread less a muleteer who is a gambler than one who is weak, a cook who blasphemes than an ignorant one. I don't take it upon me to say what the world should do, plenty of others take it upon themselves, but only what I do about this.

Mihi sic usus est : tibi, ut opus est facto, face.

(My way is thus · do you, as you think well)

For table-companions I choose agreeable people, not prudent ones; in bed, beauty before goodness; for social conversation, ability even without wisdom: similarly elsewhere. Like the man who was discovered astride a stick playing with his children, and begged that person who surprised him to say nothing about it until he was a father himself, believing that the passion which would then spring up in his soul would make him a fair judge of such actions, I should wish also to speak to people who have experienced what I am saying: but knowing how remote such a friendship is from ordinary customs, and how rare it is, I do not expect to find any good judge; for even the writings antiquity has left us on this subject seem weak to me compared with the feeling I have; and on this point experience surpasses even the precepts of philosophy.

Nil ego contulerim jucundo sanus amico.

(Nothing will I compare, while sane, to a pleasant friend)

ON FRIENDSHIP

Old Menander called that man happy who had been able to find even the shadow of a friend: he was certainly right in saying this, especially as he had had a chance to try. For, in truth, if I compare all the rest of my life, although by the grace of God I have passed a pleasant one, easy, and save for the loss of such a friend, exempt from heavy affliction, full of tranquillity of spirit, for I have accepted my natural and individual advantages, without seeking others, if, I say, I compare it all with the four years it was given me to enjoy the sweet company and society of that person, it is only smoke, it is only dark and tedious night. Since the day I lost him,

Quem semper acerbum,
Semper honoratum (sic dî voluistis!) habebo,

(Which I shall always keep,
Bitter but honoured, — thus ye willed it,
gods!)

all I do is to drag along languidly; and the very pleasures that offer themselves to me, instead of consoling me, redouble my regret for his loss: we were halves in everything; it seems to me that I rob him of his part.

Nec fas esse ulla me voluptate hic frui
Decrevi, tantisper dum ille abest meus particeps.

(Indulgence in a pleasure were not right,
I judge, so long as my partaker's gone)

I was already so trained and habituated to being his second everywhere, that I feel myself no more than a half.

Illam meæ si partem animæ tulit
Maturior vis, quid moror altera?
Nec carus æque, nec superstes
Integer. Ille dies utramque
Duxit ruinam —

(If death has prematurely snatched away
One half my soul, why should the other stay?
The part remaining of my soul
Is not so dear and not so whole.
One day did ruin both—)

In every action and thought I miss him; as he would also have me: for just as he surpassed me by an infinite distance in every other capacity and virtue, so did he in the duties of friendship.

Quis desiderio sit pudor, aut modus
Tam cari capitis?

(What shame or measure shall there be to
grief
For so beloved a life?)

O misero frater adempte mihi!
Omnia tecum una perierunt gaudia nostra,
Quæ tuus in vita dulcis alebat amor.
Tu mea, tu moriens fregisti commoda, frater;
Tecum una tota est nostra sepulta anima:
Cujus ego interitu tota de mente fugavi
Hæc studia, atque omnes delicias animi.

Alloquar? audiero nunquam tua verba loquentem?
Nunquam ego te, vita frater amabilior,
Adspiciam posthac? At certe semper amabo.

(O brother taken away from wretched me!)
Every one of our pleasures perished when you
were taken,
All when you were living nourished with
your sweet love.
You, yes, you, by dying destroyed all my com-
forts, my brother;
All the soul of us both is buried along with
you:

Thereupon I with a total destruction of wit went
fleeing,
Leaving all our studies and all the joys of
the mind.

Shall I speak? Shall I listen never to another word
you are saying?
Shall I never, brother of mine, more pleas-
ant to me than life,
Shall I never again behold you? At least I shall
not cease loving.)

But let us hear this lad of sixteen speak a little.

Because I have discovered that this work has since been made public, and for an evil purpose, by those who seek to upset and alter the form of our government, without caring whether they better it, and that they have mingled it with other writings from their own mill, I have decided not to place it here. And in order that the author's memory be not injured for those who have not been able to learn his opinions and actions for themselves, I will inform them that this topic was

treated of by him in his boyhood by way of exercise only, as being a common theme and one abused in a thousand places in the books. I have no doubt but that he believed what he wrote; for he was conscientious enough not to lie even at his play: and I know moreover that had he had the choice, he would rather have been born in Venice than at Sarlac; and with good reason. But he had another maxim also sovereignly imprinted on his soul, to obey and to submit religiously to the laws under which he had been born. There was never a better citizen, or one more devoted to his country's tranquillity, or more an enemy to the disturbances and innovations of his epoch; he would much rather have bent his talents to extinguishing them than to furnishing means to further them: he had a character moulded in the fashion of other ages than these. But, in lieu of this serious piece of work, I will substitute another, produced in the same season of his age, gayer and more playful.

XXIX SONNETS

BY

ESTIENNE DE LA BOETIE

With Montaigne's Dedication to
Madame de Grammont
Countess of Guissen

XXIX SONNETS

By Estienne de La Boetie

To

Madame De Grammont
Countess of Guissen

MADAME, I HERE OFFER you nothing of my own, either because it is already yours, or because I find nothing there worthy of you; but I could wish that these verses, wheresoever they might be seen, should bear your name in front, for the honour it will be to them to have as a guide the great Corisande d'Andoins. This gift seems to me fitting for you, because there are few ladies in France who have better judgement, and who make a more apt use of poetry; and besides, because there are none who can render it alive and lively as you do by those beautiful, rich harmonies, wherewith, in addition to a

million beauties, nature has endowed you. Madame, these verses merit your cherishing; for you will be of my opinion that there have come none out of Gascony having more ingenuity and charm, or testifying to have issued from a fuller hand. And do not grow jealous because you have but those remaining after what I erstwhile printed under the name of Monsieur de Foix, your good kinsman: for really these exhibit a something, I know not what, more lively and sparkling; for he made them in his greener youth and warmed by a fair and noble ardour, which I will tell you about, madame, one of these days, in your ear. The others were made later, when he was in pursuit of his marriage, in honour of his wife, and when he already felt I know not what marital coolness. And I am one of those who hold that poetry is never elsewhere so smiling as it is on a wanton and irregular theme.

SONNETS

... I ...

O pardon, Love, my lord, to thee I vow
My voice, my verse, the remnant of my years,
My sobs, my sighs, my crying and my tears;
I hold of no one else but thee from now.

Alas, my fortune's played with me, and how!
A while ago I met thee, Love, with jeers,
But now I'm caught, I'm thine, my fault appears.
I kept my heart too guarded; take it thou.

If guarding it, I made thy victory wait,
Don't hurt it, and thy glory is more great.
And if thou hast not won me at a blow,

A conqueror predestined to prevail,
When once he's made his strong opponent fail,
Will like him more because defeat was slow.

LA BOETIE

... II ...

'Tis love, 't is love, 't is he alone I know:
But liveliest love and poison the most sore
To which poor heart did ever open door.
'Twas not a single arrow he let go,

But all himself with arrows, quiver, bow.
Less than a month is gone since freedom's o'er,
Since in my veins this deadly drug I bore,
To both my heart and sense's overthrow.

Suppose this love in equal measure grew
Which comes to birth in me with such ado?
O grow, if thou canst grow, and growing mend.

Thou liv'st on tears, I promise thee mine eyes;
To cool thee, thou shalt have unending sighs;
But let the pain of being born have end.

SONNETS

··· *III* ···

'Tis done, my heart, our liberty is o'er.
What would it serve to lengthen our defence?
'T would aggravate both torture and offence;
The strength I used to have, I have no more.

My reason was for me in days of yore:
Revolted now, she 'd have me think from hence
That servitude is due, in recompense
Believe it such as none e'er knew before.

If it must be, the time is come to yield
When reason serves no longer as a shield.
I see that love, for no affront I gave,

Without excuse has come to seize on me;
And with a king like love, I also see,
If he be wrong, then reason shall be slave.

LA BOETIE

··· IV ···

'T was at the time when greatest heat is past,
Untidy Autumn crowds into the vat
And treads with flowing feet his grapes now fat,—
'T was then my trouble first began to last.

The peasants thresh the harvest they've amassed,
And roll the foaming hogsheads; and with that,
And with the fruitful vintage lying flat,
They take revenge for sorrows coming fast.

May this not be an augury or sign
That hope is harvested and in decline?
No, certainly. But surely I foresee,

I'll gather, if I've learned to augur well,
And guess at what the weather should foretell,
A splendid crop from hope's long nurtured tree.

SONNETS

... V ...

I've seen his piercing eyes, his visage bright;
None look upon the gods except for ill:
His conquering eye has left me heartless, chill,
Astounded at the blow of utter light:

As one belated in the field at night,
Grows pale when heaven's arrow whizzing shrill
Flies by and shuts his eyes; and trembles still,
Aghast when angry Jove assails his sight.

Madame, be candid, tell, your eyes of green,
Are they not those Love will not let be seen?
The only time I saw I thought them so;

At any rate I know that when I thought,
When suddenly my eyes and heart were caught,
That Love uncovering his, unstrung his bow.

LA BOETIE

... VI ...

There are who say, But why should he complain,
And lose his better years in paltry things?
Why, if he hope, these hearty sorrowings?
Or, hoping not, may not content remain?

I said as much when I was free and sane.
But, sure 't is only wits with broken wings,
And hearts where haughty rigour tears the strings
That can complain of my complaint and pain.

A hundred sudden blows Love's dagger thrust,
And they forbid me crying, though I must.
I am not vain, to make my woe increase

By talking: if they'll remedy my woe,
I'll let my singing, let my sonnets go;
But he that chides my moan should make it cease.

SONNETS

··· VII ···

Your glory in my lays I try to sing,
But dare not put your name into my verse:
In shallows of that ocean I immerse,—
I dread to drown, I land all quivering.

I fear the harm imperfect praises bring.
But men amazed at this that I rehearse,
Are burning for your name; and, dazzled worse
The more they seek for such a sacred thing,

Cannot succeed in seeing what is plain;
And clumsy as they are, shall ne'er attain,
Unless they try a means they cannot see:

For let them choose, compared to all the rest,
Of perfect women, one, the perfectest,
They then can cry (if voice remain), 'T is she!

LA BOETIE

··· VIII ···

When comes the day your very name shall pace
Through France upon my verse? How oft I fear
Lest anxious heart, rash hands inscribe it here!
Writ of itself, it often slips in place.

In spite of me I write, in spite efface.
Astræa will, with faith and right appear,
And then your joyful name be shining clear.
To these bad times, that cover up its face

A bitter shame it is, to these bad times.
Madame, you'll be Dordoigne within my rhymes.
Permit that none the less your name be told;

Have pity on the times: for if I tell,
If they should come to know, believe me well,
'Tis then, if ever, they shall be of gold.

SONNETS

··· IX ···

Among your beauties fealty shows fair!
A steady heart, a courage ever fast,
Among your virtues they are highly classed:
A faithful friend is beautiful and rare.

How faithless is your sister, the Vesere;
She runs along and wanders, first and last,
Uncertain in her course, goes floating past,
And breezes play at pleasure with her hair.

Because she is the elder, never rue
That you have chosen constancy for you.
The friendship of the twins that shine above

And share their parts of heaven and of hell,
Was of the very race that bore as well
The over-lovely Helen's luckless love.

LA BOETIE

··· *X* ···

How humble ever, my Dordoigne, you flow;
Ashamed to be a Gascon girl in France.
The brook of Sorgue has found a famous chance,
But once upon a time it was as low.

Behold the little Loir doth swiftly go,
As if, among the great, he should enhance;
He marches in a haughty, hurried dance,
Beside the Mince, contented to be slow.

Since Arne grafts on an olive-tree, the Loire
Is splendider than other rivers are.
But give me leave, Dordoigne, to sing your name,

If I succeed, you then are better known;
And those exalted gods Garonne and Rhone
Shall envy you and feel, perhaps some shame.

SONNETS

··· XI ···

Do not be harsh, you know the sighs I've spent,
The tears that in my native way I shed;
Bid not my love so different be led
By that chill Tuscan's languorous lament,

Or by Catullus, frolicsomely bent,
Who while he fondled hearts would pierce them dead,
Or Hellenish Propertius, wise of head;
Their mode for them and mine for me is meant.

Who learns of other men to master grief
May learn another's amorous belief:
A man can feel and know his inner rage,

And tell of love, what he himself has known.
So I express one heart and grief, my own.
For he but little loves, who loves by gauge.

LA BOETIE

··· *XII* ···

O clouds and wind and tempest, ever higher
When I am on my way to her, you tear
The woods, the road, the mountain, fill the air,
And lie in wait for me, to wreak your ire!

My heart but burns with ever fiercer fire.
Go, go and find some merchant you can scare
Who scours the sea to seek his treasure there;
'Tis not for this my courage will retire.

I hear the wind and storm, and at their cries
Within my heart I mock their bad emprise.
Do they suppose I'll yield me in dismay.

Let both attempt their worst, the sky, the air.
I choose, I choose, and plainly so declare,
If die I must, I'll die Leander's way.

SONNETS

··· XIII ···

Who never knew the way to love, behold,
I speak of my Leander! hark to me,
For now or never is the time to see,
If you have hearts of any comely mould.

With dauntless dripping arms, the lad was bold,
Helped on by love, to battle with the sea
That took the maid for tribute, leaving free
The brother and the ram inwrapped in gold.

One night that he was vanquished by the wave,
When he could see, — this lover ever brave, —
How loving waters dragged him from his track,

He spoke unto the billows' endless flow,
And said, Be pleased to suffer me to go,
And hold my death until I'm coming back.

LA BOETIE

··· XIV ···

O fickle heart! O spirit weak and ill!
Do you suppose I'll suffer you forever?
O empty bounty! malice sly and clever,
O traitrous beauty, sweetness apt to kill!

And so you were your sister's sister still?
Too simple, I must make my whole endeavour
Upon myself, and learn or late or never,
Your double speech, and singing hunter's skill.

Upon the day I took to loving you,
'T were mine the waves of ocean to subdue.
But what can I look forward to to-day?

How am I able now to be content?
And who shall give your heart a loyal bent,
Which mine had not the power to convey?

SONNETS

··· XV ···

I'm not a man whom people thus abuse;
They'd better cheat some child, whose taste is plain,
Who hears unwitting what he can't explain;
For I can love, or hate if I should choose.

You are content to have employed your ruse
And closed my eyes; I now must see again;
I am ashamed and weary of the stain
On time and labour I did badly use.

And would you dare, who thus have treated me,
To talk to me again of constancy?
You take a joy in my extreme of ill,

Forbidding me to feel my torment's touch
Yet wishing me to die through loving much.
Not feeling it, how could I love you still?

LA BOETIE

··· XVI ···

What have I said? Alas, what have I thought?
A blasphemy against her have I sung?
Her honour has been touched with traitor tongue;
On me, by me, shall her revenge be wrought.

In you, my heart is lodged: oh, have him caught:
To novel tortures have the villain flung,
My lady, where with torment he'll be wrung,
Do all, except dismiss him, as you ought.

But you will be, I'm certain, too humane
To look for very long upon my pain:
And yet to such a deed is pardon due?

At least I'll cry aloud that I retract
My sonnets, liars taken in the act:
And for the pair, I'll write five hundred new.

SONNETS

··· XVII ···

If reason rules again this soul of mine,
If I can still recover at this hour,
If I return to manly sense and power,
O blessed letter, all the thanks is thine!

Could any mortal man (alas!) divine
That I, with rage and torture to devour,
Would chase my love with curses to her bower?
And then afar, ashamed, I saw thee shine,

O blessed paper! now myself anew
With great devotion I came back to view.
I would erect an altar in the place,

To blaze abroad the blessed words she writ.
But never man must read them, none is fit;
Nor I, except for her forgiving grace.

LA BOETIE

··· XVIII ···

I was about to reap eternal rue ;
My spirit heated by my anger burned,
The folly of my voice, to fury turned,
Accused the gods, accused my lady too :

When in my fire fell a charm she threw ;
Returning to myself, I quickly learned
How fury, in its presence fled, was spurned, —
The victor brought my soul in fury's lieu.

Now you who hear the marvels I retail,
What say you, were it not indeed to fail
If I should not, as now I do, adore ?

What miracles may not her eyes effect,
The radiance of her face, when you reflect
Her writing wrought a wonder ? They 'd do more.

SONNETS

··· *XIX* ···

I trembled, and awaited, chill with dread,
The sentence that should expiate my crime.
Acknowledging my fault I came to time,
And, Look, I have forgiven you, she said.

Now sing my praises, see that they are spread:
Devote your years, and decorate your rhyme,
Enriching with my name our native clime;
Cover your fault with verses heaped instead.

Then up, my pen! rejoicing at the spur,
We'll run a larger course to honour her.
But watch her eye, lest she should glance aside.

Without her eyes, our languid hearts expire.
They give the meaning, and they give the fire.
If I'm to pay, it's needful she provide.

LA BOETIE

··· XX ···

O ye accursed sonnets who could dare
To touch my lady! wicked and perverse,
The Muses' blame, and scandal of my verse!
If I must own your making and declare

That you are of my race, a shameful pair,
To whom the green-eyed Muses ne'er were nurse,
Or brooks that gold Apollo can disburse;
But in their place Tisiphone was there.

If I have any part in future times,
I ask that both be banished from my rhymes.
And if I burn you not, but let you live,

It is for your disgrace: live on, be seen,
Before the eyes of all, dishonoured, mean;
For 't is to punish you I now forgive.

SONNETS

··· *XXI* ···

Insist no more to wish for me, my friends,
That I abandon love; for obstinate,
I'll live and die a lover, 't is my state:
Upon the thread of love my life depends.

The fairy spoke: I know what she intends, —
Œagria saw Meleager's fate:
When he was born, his log lay in the grate,
You end, she said, whene'er this fire ends.

'T was thus she spoke, and to the ordered goal
The thread unwound, by destiny's control.
The brand was burned away, and what she spoke,

A miracle, arrived; the wretched prince, —
A living lover but a moment since, —
Lost suddenly both life and love in smoke.

LA BOETIE

··· XXII ···

When I behold your conquering eyes with awe,
I look on hope within, a written scroll,
I look on love within, who, smiling, droll,
Allures me with a future free of flaw.

I dare converse with you, and thence I draw
No hope, but only parching of the soul;
No favourable word to keep me whole,
But cruelty that knows another law.

Then if your eyes are for me, I decide
To yield myself to them and none beside.
But what a state is yours of inward war,

When mouth and eyes fall out and contradict!
My sweet tormentor, let them not conflict,
Support your eyes, live up to what they swore.

SONNETS

··· *XXIII* ···

From your determined eyes my courage springs:
Within I see gay, leaping liberty,
The little bowman leading jauntily
Blithe merriment and pleasure having wings.

But what you speak is rigourous, and stings,
And shows me in your heart proud Honesty;
And overcome, I see hard Chastity
Who gravely sits, and Virtue, savage things.

And so my life is tossed upon the waves,
Her mouth repulses me, her aspect saves,
Alas, in such a plight how came I through!

A lover likes to feel himself secure,
But serving night and day I am not sure
That even what I fear the worst is true.

LA BOETIE

··· XXIV ···

And now I may announce, my hope is dead;
My welfare and my ease to end are brought.
My woe is clear: I see how I am caught,
The sorrow that I drag around, I've wed.

All is against me, every comfort fled,
And all desert me, and of her I've naught,
But evermore some new sustaining thought
Wherewith my growing grief and woe are fed.

My only hope is gaining through my rhyme
A sigh from people in the coming time:
And some for pity's sake to say of me:

They two were born predestined by their fate
To die in equal measure obstinate,
His lady ever cold, still constant he.

SONNETS

··· *XXV* ···

So languorously long my life is mean,
That I've beheld, — and yet did not expire, —
My vanquished broken hope toss high and higher
Against the rocky rigour of her mien.

What use have all these years unending been?
She looks upon my woe and does n't tire,
But laughing at it, she is all afire
To keep my sorrow vigourous and green.

So I shall have, — a lover never blessed, —
A constant heart and constantly distressed.
I feel I am exhausted by degrees,

About to lose my life beneath my load;
But what to do, except to keep the road?
Aroused by grief, I cling to my disease.

LA BOETIE

··· *XXVI* ···

If then my heavy destiny is such,
I'll fill it to the border, if I can.
My suffering is parcel of her plan,—
I'll carry out my sorrow, make it much.

Ye forest nymphs, whom my distresses touch
And give a certain sympathy with man,
What think ye? May I end as I began,
If I have never a relief to clutch?

If one of you incline to hark to me,
I pray thee, mark the future I foresee:
The day is near when all my forces vain

Shall yield no more subsistence to my grief.
And that I hope, for this is my belief,
That dying I escape from all my pain.

SONNETS

··· XXVII ···

When wearing me away wears out my grief,
Then Love reviveth sorrow with a joy,
And soothes my wounded heart, and with some toy
Amuses it, gives hope of new relief,

And then I have some shadowy belief:
Whereon, with arms that tyrannies employ,
He hastens in his hardness to destroy,
And dashes growing hope against a reef

Of novel tortures; then I soon repent
That I rebelled against my punishment.
I hail the grief, O gods, that eats me up!

I drink the health and pleasure of my pain!
O happy he, who drinks in sorrow's cup
Unceasingly! and happy once again!

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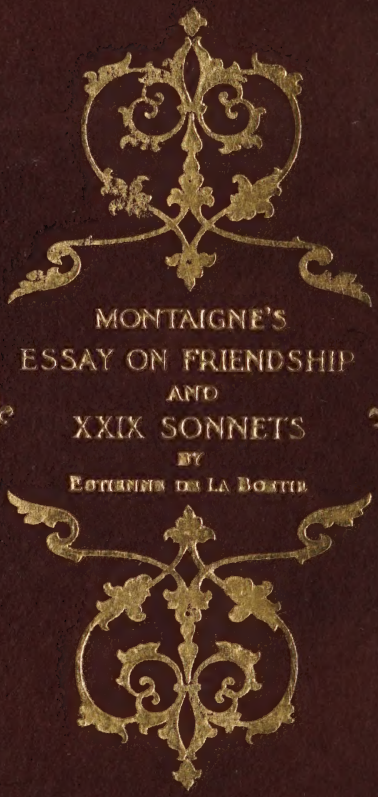

MONTAIGNE'S ESSAY ON FRIENDSHIP AND XXIX SONNETS

BY

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